



Dr. Lederberg Opposes Federal Cancer Agency

Proposed creation of a new federal agency to fight cancer would be a mistake, Dr. Joshua Lederberg of Stanford University said March 16.

The Nobel Laureate in genetics said that "all health research should be knit together within a single agency, specifically an augmented and strengthened National Institutes of Health."

Lederberg said that when a separate agency to lead a national crusade against cancer was proposed, he publicly favored it. This was because he thought a new organization might be a way to avoid traditional bureaucratic restraints and inconsistency that have hampered health research in the past several years.

Since then, however, developments have led him to conclude that a separate agency for cancer is not the best choice.

Among the new developments Lederberg listed:

- President Nixon's new public commitment to health research in general, and cancer in particular.
- evidence of a new balance, consistency and efficiency in administration of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare under Secretary Elliot Richardson's leadership.
- statements by President Nixon's science adviser Edward David on the integrity of basic scientific work in the health field, and the disadvantages of ex-

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tracting cancer work from the NIH.

Lederberg expressed his views in a letter to the subcommittee on health of the Senate's Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. The subcommittee conducted the hearings in Washington on a bill which would remove the National Cancer Institute from the NIH and move it to an authority that would report directly to the President.

Lederberg also called for broadening the base for research on human cancer, and cautioned that a crusade against cancer is an oversimplification, with a potential for backfiring if unachievable hopes are aroused.

"I believe that 'Cure Cancer' is a misleading slogan," he wrote, "but only because cancer prevention is a far more promising approach than the cure of the

disease once established. Prevention also offers the most incisive channels for exploiting basic molecular and cell biology."

Lederberg said he expects important advances in control of cancer to come from the field of immunology. Recent work has thrown light on the role of the immune system hitherto thought of mainly in connection with infectious diseases like smallpox, polio, and diphtheria.
